DC FIRE/EMS TRUNKED SYSTEM SWITCH-OVER COMING SOON!

The long awaited switch to a digital trunked radio system is coming closer for many District agencies. The District got a new fire chief in December, and with it, the trunked system cut-over date was once again pushed back for fire/EMS. The switch-over, says Wendell Giggy from fire/EMS communications, will likely take place during late spring or early summer. The city's Emergency Management Agency (EMA) has already switched, and some fire/EMS staff have been testing the system for several months.

All tower work has been completed, Giggy noted, and the chief wants to have the new station alerting system installed before moving into the new communications center on McMillan Drive NW, adjacent to the existing facility. In the past, a fire fighter on each shift in each firehouse had to stand watch and monitor the landline "vocal alarm" circuit for dispatches, then sound the station's bells. This will soon be controlled from the new communications center.

The alerting will likely take place on one or two of the city's UHF channels that will be vacated in the move to the trunked system (keep an ear on 453.225, 453.45, 453.525, 453.75 and 453.875). Giggy noted that station alerting could also be implemented over the trunked system if, for some reason, the city decides to use the UHF channels for another application. A hospital alerting system is already in place using the trunked system.

Once the station alerting system is completed, Giggy says fire/EMS communications and EMA will move into the new building with a new CAD system and switch fire/EMS communication to the trunked system. Scanner listeners will continue to hear dispatches on 154.19, but he says the department has no plans to simulcast other talkgroups onto the old channels from the digital system.

EMA and fire/EMS each procured eight-channel trunked systems separately. Now they are one system with two partitions. EMA will remain on its eight channels and fire/EMS will normally use its own eight 852 MHz channels and will expand into the EMA allocations if necessary, but not the other way around.

In coming months the EMA is expected to assist other city agencies, such as schools and public works, move to the EMA portion of the trunked system. MPD plans to upgrade its existing 460 MHz system and will not move to this trunked system. MPD dispatchers, however, will supposedly have the ability to patch into selected talkgroups as required.

The system has transmit sites at the Capitol View Plaza Senior Center, Saint Elizabeth's Hospital, Georgetown University Medical Center, the 4th District MPD police station, and a fifth site at fire communications. The system will also broadcast into the Metro tunnels. The EMA portion transmits on 855.2125, 855.2375, 855.4625, 856.9875, 857.9875, 858.9875, 859.9875 and 860.9875. The fire/EMS portion transmits on 852.6125, 852.6375, 852.6625, 852.6875, 852.7125, 852.7375, 852.7625 and 852.7875. The system will support both analog and digital, but fire/EMS talkgroups are planned to be digital.

If everything goes as planned, fire/EMS radios will be programmed with 11 zones, the first five will be for DC fire/EMS, followed by the 800 MHz National and COG channels, then zones for Virginia jurisdictions, Alexandria, Arlington, MWAA (airports) and Fairfax County (see table). The Virginia zones will be grouped and numbered in the same sequence as they will appear in radios belonging to northern Virginia fire departments. The northern Virginia departments have agreed on this standardized zone and talkgroup plan. Talkgroups for Arlington County fire/EMS, for example, will always be Virginia zone 2 regardless of the participating jurisdiction's radio.

The District will have about 55 digital fire/EMS talkgroups. Special thanks to Keith Victor for assisting with this report.

PUBLIC ACCESS: An Expensive Alternative to Old Fashioned Scanning

For the first time, District fire apparatus will have the ability to communicate directly with fire apparatus from other jurisdictions, as well as city EMS units, using the same radio. Also for the first time, scanner listeners may be unable to fully monitor the city's fire and EMS channels, at least until a digital scanner becomes available.

But there is hope. Greg Knox, inventor of the TrunkTracker, recently acknowledged on Internet news groups that he is working on a digital (Project 25) scanner interface. A working prototype is hopefully coming soon. After he is successful, according to one insider, development on a real scanner should follow. But the process could be a couple years away.

Just what options do scanner listeners have until then? The District has not announced any plans for public access. Fairfax County, however, which plans to switch to a digital Motorola trunked system later this year, is considering a public-access plan. The current cut-over date is planned for September.

Fairfax County police spokesman Warren Carmichael said he has copies of the access plans used by Seattle, Washington, and Cleveland, Ohio. He said Fairfax County would likely base any access plan on those cities. The plan must be approved by the county executive. The county may also consider programming compatible equipment from other manufacturers to receive approved talkgroups.

In 1994, before the TrunkTracker had been invented, Seattle drafted a "media access plan" to provide access to the regional emergency communications system Seattle had joined along with other emergency agencies in King County. The city later developed a citizens access plan, modeling it after the media access plan. Citizens could choose any combination of 11 fire/EMS, four citywide, and five police talkgroups. The price for the city-sanctioned radios purchased through Motorola start at $1600 for an MTS2000 without a display. Accessories, programming fees and taxes are extra.

Delaware, as covered in the May 1999 CHM newsletter, has a policy in place to allow the media, as

well as the public, to purchase radios to monitor the primary talkgroups of state agencies. Primary talkgroups include those used for dispatching or for running wanted/stolen checks. Participation by county and municipal agencies that use the state's system is voluntary. The state's contract with Motorola does not cover public access radios, so requesters must pay about $4,000 for either a digital portable or mobile radio, and applicable programming fees.

Probably one of the most interesting arrangements in this region is that of Baltimore. On Nov. 2 the police department joined the fire department on the city's digital trunked system. Police spokesman Sgt. Scott Rowe said members of the media lease a radio from the city for $100 per month. The radios include some police and fire/EMS talkgroups. But the plan applies only to the media. Fourteen radios were allocated for the media lease plan and all have already been claimed. Rowe said the city is now considering allowing media to purchase radios through Motorola.

ALEXANDRIA NEW TYPE II LINE-UP

Alexandria recently switched to Motorola Type II trunking -- about 10 years after the city's trunk was activated as a Type I system. Also, the fire department's "wide area" channel, 855.5125, became part of the trunked system. The "wide area" channel is now digital and transmits on 866.975.

The still-analog trunked channels are 854.4875, 855.5125, 855.5625, 856.8375, 857.8375, 858.8375, 859.8375 and 860.8375. Transmit sites are at the Mark Winkler building and the Masonic Temple. 855.5125 became known as the "wide area" channel since it had simulcast the fire/EMS dispatch talkgroup from additional

sites. Special thanks to Willard Hardman and Will "Stormbringer" Smith for their diligent efforts.

58384 E410 Police 1 Dispatch
58416 E430 Police 2 Ops 1
58448 E450 Police 3 Ops 2
58480 E470 Police 4 Parking Enforcement
58512 E490 Police 5 Police Vice
58544 E4B0 Police 6 Sheriff 1
58576 E4D0 Police 7 Sheriff 2
58608 E4F0 Police 8 Supervisors
58640 E510 Police 9 Command
58672 E530 Police 10 Hostage Negotiation Team
58704 E550 Police 11 Animal Control
58736 E570 Police 12 Police Spl Ops Team/Canine
58768 E590 Police 13 Police Jump-out Team
58864 E5F0 Fire 1-A Dispatch-1
58896 E610 Fire 1-B Ops 2 (Fire Ops)
58928 E630 Fire 1-C Ops 3 (Fire Ops)
58960 E650 Fire 1-D Ops 4 (Fire Ops)
58992 E670 Fire 1-E Ops 5 (EMS Ops)
59024 E690 Fire 1-F Ops 6 (EMS Ops)
59056 E6B0 Fire 1-G Ops 7 (EMS Ops)
59088 E6D0 Fire 1-H Alex Hosp 8
59120 E6F0 Fire 1-I Command 9
59152 E710 Fire 1-J Code Enforcement 10
    (permit inspection)
59184 E730 Fire 1-K Code Enforcement 11
    (fire marshals)
----- ---- Fire 1-L Widearea Dispatch Simulcast   (866.975r)
digital)
----- ---- Fire 1-M Widearea Dispatch Simulcast   (866.975s)
digital)
----- ---- Fire 1-N Braddock Road Metro Tunnel
 (854.2125r)
----- ---- Fire 1-O Braddock Road Metro Tunnel
    (854.2125s)
----- ---- Fire 1-P Dynamic Regroup
59216 E750 Fire Support 1
59248 E770 Fire Support 2
59280 E790 Fire Support 3
59312 E7B0 HELP Channel
59344 E7D0 Permit Inspectors
59376 E7F0 HMS Highway
59408 E810 HMS Maintenance
59440 E830 DASH Buses
59472 E850 Traffic Division
59504 E870 School Security/Maintenance
59536 E890 Parks and Recreation
59568 E8B0 Trash & Environmental Services
59600 E8D0 LG Command
59664 E910 LG Emergency 1
59696 E930 LG Emergency 2

ARLINGTON COUNTY FIRE NEW TYPE II TALKGROUPS

About the same time that Alexandria switched to Type II, Arlington County fire did the same. Some county agencies, however, continue to use the Type I format. Here's the new fire/EMS talkgroup plan, the frequencies remain unchanged. Channels 2-M, 2-N, and 2-O are conventional channels intended for the Metro tunnel communications system. The three frequencies are, 856.4875, 858.4875 and 859.4875.

34384 8650 2-A Dispatch
34416 8670 2-B OPS
34448 8690 2-C OPS
34480 86B0 2-D OPS
34512 86D0 2-E OPS
34544 86F0 2-F Special Incident
34576 8710 2-G Call
34608 8730 2-H Administrative
34640 8750 2-I Fire Prevention
34672 8770 2-J Special Events
----- ---- 2-K Dynamic Regrouping
----- ---- 2-L Arlington Direct 867.0125 [156.7]
See   Note 2-M Police Metro
See   Note 2-N EMS Metro
See   Note 2-O Fire Metro
----- ---- 2-P Arlington Direct 867.0125 [156.7]

FAIRFAX COUNTY UPDATES

Fairfax County's new Motorola control channel went on the air for testing during the first week of February. The system controller can rotate among four channels, 860.2625, 859.2625, 858.2625 and 857.2625. The signal originates from the Merrifield tower, and the system is being used for chitchat and coverage tests. The re-

maining sites are expected to be on the air around the end of April.

If this schedule holds, says 2Lt Curt J. Andrich, Fairfax County radio services manager, the system should be on the air for optimization and coverage testing in mid-May, with cut-over to the new system sometime during the summer.

In an e-mail posted to the Scan-DC e-mail list, Andrich said the current plan is to keep fire channel 1 (460.575) operational as a paging and notification channel, especially for the volunteer stations. All other operations will be on the digital system.

The new mobile data terminal (MDT) system, a Motorola RD-LAP 19.2 KBPS network, is anticipated to be operational by the time you read this, with the installation of new terminals in the vehicles to already be in progress.

The new MDTs, called the "PC Mobile," are ruggedized pentium laptops made by XL Computing. The units will operate off a UHF Motorola radio system. It will be a six-channel system, as opposed to the current two-channel system. The six channels are: 453.25, 453.675, 460.125, 460.175, 460.225 and 460.3.

In another message posted to the Scan-DC e-mail list, Major Lee Williams says Fairfax County police has changed the patch scheme. During slow periods, two police channels may be patched together so only one dispatcher is needed. This is being done in recognition of the patrol bureau re-organization. If workload gets busy, especially on the McLean/Mason patch, the communication center can unpatch and assign separate dispatchers to each channel. Channels are now patched in the following combinations:

Reston and Fair Oaks, channels 5 and 8
McLean and Mason, channels 3 and 4
West Springfield and Countywide (HQ/admin), channels 7 and 1
Mount Vernon and Franconia, channels 2 and 6

SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY GOING TRUNKED

Spotsylvania County, Virginia is migrating to an EDACS trunked system. Kurt Sokolowski and Ken Fowler provide the following details.

856.4875 LCN1
857.4875 LCN2
858.4875 LCN3
859.4875 LCN4
860.4875 LCN5
866.6125 LCN6
867.4000 LCN7
867.6750 LCN8

The county is also licensed on two of the national channels, 866.0125 and 866.5125.

AFS	Dec	Hex	Use
00-081	0065	0041	Fire/EMS Admin
01-023	0147	0093	Radio Techs
04-021	0529	0211	Building Office
04-022	0530	0212	Environmental Engineering
04-081	0577	0241	Animal Control
04-121	0609	0261	Public Works
15-157	2047	07ff	Sheriff Patch (simulcasts 39.44)

MONTGOMERY COUNTY AWARDS CONTRACT

Montgomery County awarded the contract for its 800 MHz digital trunked system to Motorola. The estimated turn-on date is fall 2001 according to Eric Bernard, president of the Rockville Volunteer Fire Department. Fire/EMS will be using the bright yellow XTS3000 Model II handheld radios. A new emergency communications center (ECC) is being constructed on Quince Orchard Road across from NIST in the former Watkins-Johnson building. Also, the county is considering assigning a portable radio to each fire fighter on every piece of apparatus.

PRINCE GEORGE'S NEW 9-1-1 CENTER

Prince George's County moved its 9-1-1 center into a new wing of the existing building at 7911 Anchor St. in Lan-

dover. The new facility, with a Windows NT-based computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system designed by Tiburon, officially went online Nov. 9.

The center features Ericsson C3 Maestro dispatch consoles with the same set of 30 channels accessible from each of 25 dispatch positions. Nine positions are for fire/EMS dispatchers, two of which are reserved for supervisors. The police section has 16 dispatch consoles, which include two supervisory positions and one for the sheriff dispatcher. 9-1-1 call-takers have 21 seating positions and two for supervisors.

The 30 channels are as follows:

494.6875r [127.3] Pol 1: Hyattsville Dist (A,B)
494.5375r [127.3] Pol 2: Bowie Dist (D,E)
495.1375r [127.3] Pol 3: Seat Pleasant Dist (G)
495.0875r [127.3] Pol 4: Oxon Hill Dist (J,K)
494.5625r [127.3] Pol 5: Clinton Dist (F)
494.8875r [127.3] Pol 6: CID, NED and SOD
494.9375r [127.3] Pol 7: South Tac
494.7375r [127.3] Pol 8: North Tac
494.3125r [210.7] Pol 9: Seat Pleasant Dist (H)
495.2125r [192.8] Pol 10: Beltsville Dist (C)
495.0125r [127.3] Fire 1: Medical Resp/Ops
494.8375r [127.3] Fire 2: North Dispatch
494.7875r [127.3] Fire 3: South Tac
495.0625r [127.3] Fire 4: North Tac
494.6625r [127.3] Fire 7: South Dispatch
  46.1200s [None] Vocal (FD alerting)
866.3625r [156.7] P-MARS (Police Mutual Aid)
154.2800s [None] F-MARS (Fire Mutual Aid)
154.2950s [None] F-MARS (Fire Mutual Aid)
158.9400s [100.0] Office of Emergency Prep
155.9400r [100.0] Shared Local Government
159.1800r [100.0] Dept of Pub Wks & Transp
  45.5200s [146.2] Dept of Envir Resources
155.5800r [210.7] Sheriff 1: Dispatch
155.7900r [100.0] Sheriff 2: Tac
854.6875r [192.8] Dept of Corrections
866.0125r [156.7] National Calling Channel
See Note [156.7] National Tac
855.7375r [210.7] Hyattsville Justice Ctr
855.7375r [192.8] Upper Marlboro Courthouse

The national tac channel is chosen from one of the four: Tac 1-866.5125, Tac 2-867.0125, Tac 3-867.5125, Tac 4-868.0125. P-MARS switched to 866.3625 [156.7] from 453.55 [100.0] during the first week of February.

SCANNING HARFORD COUNTY

Lewis C. McCannon, Jr. sends along this list of frequencies for Aberdeen and Edgewood areas from our northwest listening area. Lewis says he uses a Pro-94 to monitor the Aberdeen Proving Ground and Edgewood Arsenal trunked system.

The Aberdeen system operates on 406.35, 406.7, 407.275, 407.475, 408.55 and 409.025. Edgewood uses 406.225, 407.25, 409.5 and 410.15. The control channels are usually 409.025 and 410.15.

Aberdeen Talkgroups (approximately 60 total)
1904 Aberdeen Police
1744 Aberdeen Fire
2160 Security Guard
4944 Game Warden

Edgewood Talkgroups (approximately 15 total)
3536 Edgewood Police
3632 Edgewood Fire

Conventional Frequencies
 38.4500 Tactical vehicles
 40.9000 Tactical vehicles
126.1500 Phillips AAF
126.2000 Weide AAF
419.1500 Post Housing

Harford County Schools
154.6000 Public School Maintenance
463.9250 Board of Education Admin (also 468.925)
464.3250 Aberdeen High School
   (possibly all county high schools)
464.5000 Aberdeen Middle School (also 469.5)
467.7625 Bakersfield Elementary School

Harford Community College
 30.8400
 33.1400

151.7750 Possibly discontinued
151.9250 Possibly discontinued
462.0500 Staff
462.0750 Security
463.3875

WICOMICO COUNTY GONE TRUNKED

Yet another jurisdiction has switched to a trunked system. This time its Wicomico County, but fortunately its an analog Motorola Type II. Thanks to Bill Zittle for passing along these talkgroups. Bill notes that the sheriff still primarily uses the old UHF channels.

Wicomico County
SysID: 752A (Type II)

857.9875 Voice/BSI
858.2375 Control/voice
858.9875 Control/voice
859.2375 Control/voice
860.2375 Control/voice

1616 0650 Fire Dispatch
1648 0670 Fireground-1 (East: Cos 6-7-8-11)
1680 0690 Fireground-2 (Ctrl: Cos 3-74-15)
1712 06B0 Fireground-3 (West: Cos 5-9-12-14)
1744 06D0 Fire Police
1776 06F0 Salisbury Fire Staff
1808 0710 Salisbury Fire (Hq, Cos 1-2)
1840 0730 Fire-Police Link
1872 0750 EMS Dispatch
1904 0770 EMS-1
1936 0790 EMS-2
1968 07B0 Simulcasts 453.750 (sheriff-1)
2224 08B0 Simulcasts 460.075
   (Sby Housing/Wico River Clean-up)
2256 08D0 Detention Center Primary
2288 08F0 Detention Center Tac-1
2384 0950 Detention Center Maintenance
2416 0970 Fire Central
2448 0990 Fire East
2480 09B0 Fire West
2576 0A10 Salisbury Fire (Hq Co)
2608 0A30 Salisbury Fire (Co 1)
2640 0A50 Salisbury Fire (Co 2)
2672 0A70 Fruitland VFD (Co 3)
2704 0A90 Delmar VFD (Co 74)
2736 0AB0 Hebron VFD (Co 5)
2768 0AD0 Parsonsburg VFD (Co 6)
2800 0AF0 Pittsville VFD (Co 7)
2832 0B10 Willards VFD (Co 8)
2864 0B30 Mardela Springs VFD (Co 9)
2896 0B50 Powellville VFD (Co 11)
2928 0B70 West Side VFD, Bivalve (Co 12)
2960 0B90 Sharptown VFD (Co 14)
2992 0BB0 Allen VFD (Co 15)

SKI-SCANNING AT A-BASIN, COLORADO

by Ralph Johnson (johnson@cpcug.org)

West of Denver, high astride the Continental Divide in Colorado, on the backbone of the continent, is the Arapahoe Basin ski area. The base of A-Basin, as it is known, is at 10,800 feet above sea level and the highest point, Arapahoe Peak, is at 13,050 feet. Because of the altitude, snow almost stays year round and skiing lasts into June.

Of course, while I was there I took advantage of the opportunity to see what they used for communications. A-Basin is owned by Keystone Resort. Before I departed, I searched a new version of the *Mr. Scanner* CD-ROM for possible frequencies. However, I found so many frequencies listed for Keystone Resorts, I knew I would be unable to enter them all into my Pro-26. Instead, I decided to see what would be the most likely range of frequencies A-Basin might use and I could scan those bands. The frequencies fell into two groups, around 463 and 469 MHz, so I set up to scan the appropriate ranges.

I found A-Basin using the following frequencies:

464.675 r Operations and ski patrol primary
463.575 s Paging
462.6125 Family Radio Channel

464.175 ?
467.7125 Family Radio Channel

I had a lot of opportunities to scan, since coming from sea level to 10,000+ feet, I was sucking air to breathe. After each run I took a break and scanned before I went back up for another run down the mountain. Judging by the traffic I heard on 462.6125, I believe it was a frequency some skiers used for personal communications rather than by the ski area. I monitored a couple minor accidents, but considering the more difficult nature of A-Basin terrain, the accidents were minor.

I enhanced my ability to scan with several additions. First, I used my chest holder to hold my Pro-26 scanner. This was safer as it kept the radio off my hip where it would not get crushed if I fell on it. I used the extra pocket to hold my Optoelectronics Test Receiver. It was most useful around the lift area where I was closer to the transmitters. When I sat at the lodge I set up my Rainbow Electronics WA-4 and WA-6 broad-band pre-amps to enhance reception. After I set up the pre-amps, I fed the output to the Optoelectronics receiver and my Pro-26 scanner.

This is the third ski area I have monitored for radio communications. Hearing what the resorts are doing has been helpful when I want to understand how snow conditions or equipment moving around may affect my skiing. In the case of an accident, I will also know where not to go out of respect for what the ski patrol needs to do in assisting the injured skier.

NEWSSCAN

COUNTIES TO USE CRUISER-CAMS. Montgomery and Prince George's counties plan to equip hundreds of police patrol cars with video cameras in an effort to better verify allegations of police brutality and racial profiling, reported the Jan. 17 Washington Post. Montgomery County police chief has requested $680,000 in county funding to install cameras in 108 of the Silver Spring District's patrol cars this summer.

The plans are a result of a settlement reached last year between the county and the family of an unarmed man fatally shot in the back by a county police officer last April. Under an agreement reached by the U.S. Justice Department and Montgomery officials, officers will be required to log every traffic stop made on a public high-way, asking motorists their race, gender and date of birth.

Prince George's police said they will equip about 100 cruisers with video cameras this summer and hope to outfit 100 more cars next year. The installment of the first batch of cameras is being financed with a $500,000 federal grant. The county's police chief said his long-term plan is to have cameras -- which cost about $4,500 each -- in each of the department's 650 uniformed patrol cars.

Montgomery and Prince George's counties would become the first of the region's jurisdictions to make extensive use of video cameras in police department patrol cars. Other jurisdictions, such as Arlington County, have installed them in just a few cars or, like the District, have no plans to use them.

NEW TOWER FOR CARROLL COUNTY? Lineboro, a hilly remote area in upper northeast Carroll County near the Pennsylvania border, has experienced coverage problems ever since the county switched to 800 MHz in July of 1997. Lineboro could get its own emergency communications tower, the Jan. 17 Carroll County Times reported, now that a property owner has expressed interest in allowing one on private land off Alesia-to-Lineboro Road.

Motorola, which helped develop the county's trunked system, has been asked to test whether a tower would work from the site's coordinates. Lineboro fire company officials have said emergency communications are virtually nonexistent in some areas.

BALTIMORE'S DIGITAL TRUNKED. Baltimore, boasts a PR Newswire release, is one of the first cities in the world to design and implement a fully digital communications system with a single system infrastructure to support the communications needs of both public safety and public service departments. The city's police department joined the fire department on the $65 million communications system after installation was completed Nov. 2, 1999. Motorola had been selected as the system's prime contractor in December 1996.

The system includes more than 5,000 mobile and portable radios, 28 channels and nine simulcast sites. The city's new emergency communications center (ECC) has 73 computer-aided dispatch (CAD) positions, including 31 radio dispatch positions, 18 positions for 9-1-1 call takers, 12 positions for 3-1-1 call takers, and five emer

gency medical dispatch (EMD) positions. The system also features Motorola's Oncore XT global positioning system (GPS) that displays ambulance locations.

SMARTRAVELER TRAVELS TO BALTIMORE. This summer motorists around Baltimore will be introduced to SmarTraveler -- a rapidly growing private traffic service -- which already operates in the Washington region, states the Jan. 4 Baltimore Sun.

In addition to reporting traffic conditions by phone or computer, the company says it will offer custom options for drivers. A deal with PageNet, for instance, will notify subscribers of traffic problems on their commute routes during their drive times. Using SmarTraveler costs motorists nothing. But custom options, such as the paging service, will have a price, the company says.

The idea is expected to start hitting its groove in the next two years as more sophisticated pagers, cell phones, Palm Pilots and car computer services become linked with traffic monitoring systems. By then, many more fiber optic cables, electronic sensors and video cameras will be delivering information directly from the road.

Also in the works is a test to determine whether cell phone signals from cars might help track the flow of traffic. The joint project between Maryland and Virginia will be tested on a 10- to 15-mile stretch of the Capital Beltway during this year. If it works, speed and congestion could be monitored along roads not equipped with sensors or cameras.

Through partnership with more than 20 police, government and other public agencies, SmarTraveler claims its office in downtown Washington is a clearinghouse for traffic conditions on major roads within a 30-mile radius of the city. It opened two years ago as a $12.5 million public-private partnership and is supposed to be self-supporting by now. Web site ads generate most of its income. As many as 1,000 people may phone in on a typical day, and the Web site reportedly gets about 60,000 daily hits.

In SmarTraveler's office, dispatchers keep watch over a bank of 25 screens that offer live views from hundreds of traffic cameras. A cacophony of beeps, chirps and squawks beckons from pagers, two-way radios, computer screens and many-line phones. If driving plans include Greater Washington, 202-863-1313 can be called for traffic status. Sprint Spectrum customers can make

a free cell call to SmarTraveler by dialing #211. Registered radio users in the Washington area can call them on 452.65 [131.8]. To check traffic conditions online check: www.smartraveler.com

RADIO HACKERS INTERFERE WITH POLICE CALLS. Hackers are being accused of invading police emergency networks in Southern California, confusing officers with hundreds of rogue broadcasts last year that wasted police time and in extreme cases delayed responses to emergencies. Police channels were once "sacred ground... But with new technology, that's not the case," a Santa Ana police sergeant told the Feb. 7 Los Angeles Times. "We're much more vulnerable."

In one of the most serious cases in recent months, a hacker interfered with a California Highway Patrol pursuit of a tagger in Los Angeles' Chinatown. The rogue broadcast delayed officers' calls for backup. By the time police units arrived, the tagger had slipped away. An investigation into the incident led CHP investigators to arrest a 63-year-old Bell businessman. He is also the subject of an investigation by Orange County sheriff's officials, who suspect him of breaching their radio channels more than 100 times last year. The article cited several other examples involving other hackers.

Officials blame the increase in hackers on the growing availability of cheap high-tech radios. Swap meets and private sellers offer gadgets for as little as $300 that can be modified to transmit on police channels. Other hackers are opportunists who manage to get their hands on a police officer's hand-held radio.

Catching hackers is notoriously difficult. Law enforcement officials must be prepared to track the transmission when it begins if they hope to pinpoint the source. Even when caught, suspects face misdemeanor charges, bringing a fine and a maximum jail term of a year. Orange County agencies are spending millions of dollars on a new radio system that will -- among other features -- encrypt police frequencies and better protect channels from invasion.

BAN FROM RADIO CHANNEL IRKS FIREFIGHTERS. The FCC ordered a fire department to cease using the Pittston Township's frequency after a complaint from township officials, reports the Jan. 28 Times Leader. The letter says the township alleges that firefighters talk on the frequency without a license and cause "harmful interference" to the public works department, which also uses the channel. The administration

has clashed frequently with the fire and ambulance departments.

Township firefighters, ambulance, police and emergency management workers have used 153.74 MHz along with public works employees for more than a decade. Firefighters say the township asked them to start using the frequency so they could improve emergency services, and the township spent thousands of dollars buying radio equipment to help them access the frequency.

MORE DJ SCANNING. Robin "Scanner" Rimbaud is a New York-based, sound-collage artist whose raw material is fragments of conversation picked up on a radio scanner. DJ Spooky the Subliminal Kid (Paul A. Miller) is known for his experimental, mixed-media uses of sample-based music. Both artists are linked to the techno scene and produced a 38-minute collaborative disc entitled "The Quick and the Dead." The Feb. 6 Plain Dealer says it "feels as if you're riding in an open-windowed vehicle at night, half asleep, unconsciously overhearing sounds drifting towards and away from you."

BANK ROBBER RETURNS FOR SCANNER. A career criminal who was arrested after he returned to a bank he just robbed to retrieve his forgotten police scanner has been sentenced to four years in jail. Daniel Labrie, reports the Feb. 4 Ottawa Citizen, received the sentence for his part in a hold-up of the former Beneficial Finance Co. in Ottawa. During the heist he and another masked man listened to a radio scanner tuned to the Ottawa-Carleton police frequencies to see if the police were on to them. After getting the money, they jumped into a stolen getaway car.

But not long after, Labrie realized he left his scanner on the counter. Labrie went back to the scene looking for it. As it is with many banks, the doors were locked after the robbery. When confronted with two locked glass doors, Labrie, with several people watching from inside and outside the bank, smashed both and gained entry to the building. He went ballistic when he realized his scanner had been moved and he started yelling. Eventually he got it back, but, as he left, a man at an automatic bank teller nearby noted the direction of his flight. The man pointed out the escape path when police arrived and within minutes Labrie was arrested.

Bryan Costin, Steve Finch and Mike Peyton contributed to this issue's NewsScan.

Please address all correspondence to Alan. We encourage readers to submit material and write articles that relate to the hobby. All submissions are subject to editing for style and content. When submitting material please make certain we can contact you should we have any questions. We welcome frequency and visitor requests, but please include a reply envelope.

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We encourage computer users to take part in discussions on Frank Carson's Open Channel computer BBS (301-203-8478) or subscribe to the Scan-DC listserv by sending an e-mail to majordomo@qth.net with the words "subscribe scan-dc" (no quotes) as the message.

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